

Writing a Great Research Paper: Starting Your Research Study Guide

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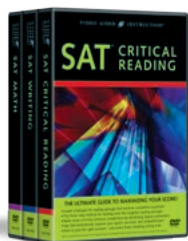
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Writing a Great Research Paper: Starting Your Research Study Guide

Introduction

What better way to start a research project than at the library? Public and school libraries are incredible treasure troves of information, but locating the right resources can be tricky. This outstanding program will teach you how to form a research plan, begin your background reading, and develop a preliminary bibliography—so you can find better materials in less time!

For easier studying and maximum success, we recommend that you view the program over a number of short sessions: don't try to absorb too much at one time. Review the entire program, or specific sections, as many times as you find necessary in order to master the material.

Perhaps most importantly: Don't forget to take advantage of your "pause" button while viewing the program. Keep plenty of scrap paper handy so you can jot down ideas, work through concepts, and more. And finally, be sure to use the myriad on-screen graphics to take notes for yourself—when you're done, you'll have a notebook you can refer back to again and again.

About Your Instructor

Karl Weber, M.A., is an educator, editor, and bestselling author in fields ranging from business to politics to test preparation. He has worked on books with such noted figures as management guru Adrian Slywotzky, Loews Hotels CEO Jonathan M. Tisch, and President Jimmy Carter.

Part 1: Primary and Secondary Sources

As you do your background reading, look for research sources that help to answer your research question and either:

- strengthen,
- challenge,
- modify, or
- illustrate

your working thesis. These may come in the form of primary or secondary sources.

Primary sources are “raw materials” that directly reflect the topic you are writing about. They are usually created by participants or others who lived at the time of the events you are writing about.

Secondary sources are reports of the research done by other people into your topic. They are usually written after the events you are writing about by people who didn’t participate in or witness those events.

Part 2: Your First Source: *The Library*

Library collections typically offer four main categories of materials:

- Books
- Periodicals
- Other printed materials
- Non-printed materials

In addition, many libraries offer:

- Computer access to Internet sources

Sometimes it’s tempting to restrict your background reading to books and periodicals only. Resist that temptation: be sure to look for relevant materials from all of the categories mentioned above. Depending on your topic, you might find some fascinating and appropriate sources that you wouldn’t have otherwise considered.

And don’t forget to ask the reference librarian about what interlibrary loan options exist at your library!

Part 3: The World of Reference Materials

Here are nine main categories of reference materials:

- Encyclopedias (general and specialized)
- Biographical dictionaries
- Periodical indexes
- Dictionaries of quotations and concordances
- Atlases and gazetteers
- Chronologies
- Dictionaries (general and specialized)
- Handbooks and sourcebooks
- Bibliographies

Some of the reference materials mentioned above will be too general for you to refer to within your research paper, but they can often be helpful in this early stage of the research paper process. They can help you track down the most well-respected books and articles about your topic, make sense of sources you’ve located, put them in context, etc.

Part 4: The Catalog: Your Key to the Library

Investigate whether your library has made its catalog available online. If so, write down its website address here (along with any username and/or password information that may be required to log in):

Before you start searching, be sure to read any instructions, tutorials, FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions), or other HELP materials that are provided online. You might even wish to ask a reference librarian for a quick introduction. If the library's catalog utilizes Boolean searching, consult the next program in this series: *Writing a Great Research Paper: Finding the Best Sources*.

Bibliographical data to record for any sources that might potentially be helpful:

- Call number
- Name of the author/editor
- Title and subtitle
- Edition/volume/issue numbers
- Place of publication
- Name of the publisher
- Copyright date
- Chapter/section/column/page numbers
- Features of the book that seem promising (especially bibliographies)

To save time in capturing this data, you may wish to photocopy the title pages and copyright pages of books or other materials and print out the appropriate screens from catalogs, indexes, websites, etc.

Part 5: Your Research Plan: The Preliminary Bibliography

Your preliminary bibliography should include:

- A few current and complete background books. These provide context for your thesis. Your earlier background reading probably mentioned the one or two most highly regarded current books on the subject.
- The most important primary sources—described if not named.
- Two or three key secondary sources, especially those most relevant to your topic and thesis.

List the sources of your preliminary bibliography here (also, be sure to capture all of the bibliographical data discussed in **Part 4**):
